

# How Infections Are Spread



**“Germs” is a common term used for bacteria, viruses, fungi and some parasites.** Germs are found everywhere.

Not all germs cause disease. Some germs even help us to stay healthy. Some germs can lead to infection or disease. A communicable disease is an infection caused by a germ that is spread from person to person, or from the environment to a person.

Some germs are **spread through the air**, usually in droplets, coughed, sneezed or breathed into the air by a person who is infected. Some germs such as the cold, influenza and mumps germs travel short distances. Others, such as measles and chickenpox stay in the air longer and can travel longer distances.

Some germs are **spread by contact**. For some diseases this needs to be direct person-to-person contact with an infected person. In other cases, germs are spread by indirect contact; that is, by contact with an object that has germs on it. Some of the infectious diseases spread by contact are pink eye and impetigo.

Infestations, such as ringworm, head lice, scabies and pinworms also spread by contact.

Other germs spread when the **blood or body fluids** of an infected person enter the bloodstream or mucous membranes of another person. Some of the diseases, spread in this way, are HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Some germs are spread by **a common source**, such as contaminated food or water. This is how food poisoning happens.

Other germs are spread by **insects or animals**.

**Many germs spread in more than one way.**

For instance, the influenza virus can be spread in droplets in the air or by contact with a tissue that someone with the flu has used to blow their nose. Each of the fact sheets in this book tells you how a specific infection is spread and what steps to take to help prevent or control its spread.